

Pam. N Amer

Our Foreign Populations

Baptist Missions to the French Canadians

The Grande Ligne Mission

THE mustard seed planted in uncongenial Canadian soil in 1834 has become a flourishing tree. Or, to use another parable, the leaven then put into the inert spiritual mass is working widely through the lump. And a woman did it. In 1827, at Lausanne, Switzerland, a widow at the early age of twenty-three, highly accomplished, endowed with rare personal graces, having an ample fortune, and above all a deep religious spirit, proceeded to Canada to convert the French Canadians. Her pastor and his wife, who had preceded her by a year, were compelled by broken health to return, leaving her alone among a strange people to face the hostile hierarchy of Rome. After great trials and opposition she established her work in the garret of a rude log house, at Grande Ligne, near Montreal, where she opened a school for the ignorant children. From 1835 to her death in 1863, a period of twenty-eight years, she wrought with a heroic devotion seldom surpassed in missionary annals. This woman was Madame Henrietta Feller. She left there a flourishing school, which has been greatly enlarged and strengthened in recent years, and has sent forth many missionaries into Canada and the United States. From 1849 to 1860 the American Baptist Home Mission Society aided in the support of missionaries to the French in Canada to the extent of \$28,000.*

*For a fuller history of this remarkable movement, send for "The Grande Ligne Mission," published by the Society

The Home Mission Society's Efforts

The first missionary work to the French Canadians in the United States was by this Society, in Northern New York in 1853, in 1860 in Sugar Creek and St. Anne, Ill., and in 1863 in Detroit, Mich. Its work in New England began in 1870, several years before any other Protestant society entered the field.

The great migration from Canada to New England began about 1860, with the expansion of the cotton manufacturing interests. In 1850 the number of French Canadian immigrants was 49,008, in 1890, including their children born here, 362,396, of whom 165,325 were in Massachusetts. Families of ten or twelve children are common. About fifty years ago a French Canadian was converted, and living to a good old age he left a large family. His descendants number 102, all of whom are Protestants, and nearly all of them Baptists.

Difficult of access were they at the first. As devoted and bigoted Romanists they would not enter a Protestant house of worship, nor admit the missionary to their homes; while copies of Scripture were rejected and burned. The priesthood endeavors to keep them solidly French, and the powerful Society of St. Jean Baptiste has as its motto: "Our language, our nationality, our religion." They have numerous costly churches, at least one cathedral costing about a half million dollars, parochial schools, convents, asylums, and are thus entrenched in old Puritan New England, boasting that they will hold the balance of power there soon.

Notwithstanding the great difficulties encountered, there has been gratifying progress in this work. Many have imbibed the liberty-loving spirit of this country. The power of the priest is not so strong as formerly. The people are becoming enlightened, for at first they were mostly illiterate. Missionaries find a welcome in many homes. Bibles and tracts are accepted and read. Large numbers often attend preaching services in the open air, occasionally making disturbance, but generally attentive and respectful.

The Present Work

In 1906, under the auspices of the American Baptist Home Mission Society, in co-operation with several State conventions, there were fifteen missionaries among the French Canadians in New England, and four in other States; one in New Jersey among the silk-workers from France. Since 1870 Rev. J. N. Williams, D.D., of Providence, R. I., has been the superintendent of the work in New England. Careful and extended investigation by him shows that there are about 3,500 French Canadian converts and their descendants in the Baptist churches of New England, a goodly number of whom have become thoroughly Americanized and are prominent in church activities.

For several years the Home Mission Society enabled the Newton Theological Institution of Massachusetts to maintain a department for the training of French missionaries; but this arrangement terminated several years ago. Generally, the converts are received into American churches, but form branches thereof, with their own services.

It is a pretty severe test of conversion for a Romanist to renounce his infant baptism and be immersed. Much easier is it often for him to become a member of a Pedobaptist church upon recognition by it of the validity of infant baptism by the Romish priesthood.

One of the Society's missionaries, on a small press of his own, assisted by his wife, has published hundreds of thousands of tracts prepared by himself, in French and English, proving by the Scriptures the radical errors of Romanism. Thus the light is penetrating the minds of benighted multitudes. As to the influence of these tracts the author says:

"A well known French Catholic funeral director paid me a visit. After having made quite a long review of the religious question, he told me that, the other day, twelve Catholic men had gathered in his shop. All of them had read some of my tracts, and, in going over the ground covered by these pamphlets, they declared that

their contents were true. Only one made objections. I was glad when I heard this statement. Is not this a sure sign of progress? Have I not good reasons for being so optimistic in my views concerning this work? We are advancing. A new day is coming."

Illustrative Incidents

"Roman emissaries came to our shores with the same burning zeal that carried Francis Xavier to India. Along the line of the St. Lawrence, through the valley of the Mississippi, in the great Northwest, and amid the savannas of the South Rome was to plant her institutions and win her converts. Thus was she to make this a Roman Catholic country. The plan miscarried. But the idea of capturing the United States for the Pope has not for one instant been abandoned. Only the plan has been changed. The immigrant now enters as a factor in the case. From every Papal country on the globe, crowds of Roman Catholics are flocking to our shores."—Rev. D. C. Eddy, D.D.

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A French Canadian missionary writes: "A young French girl, eighteen years of age, in this city, accepted a copy of the New Testament and decided to become a Christian; but when her brothers became acquainted with the facts they took away the Testament, threatened her life if she persisted to disgrace them by leaving the Romish Church, and last week sent her to Canada. All this was done by the order of the parish priest. But the girl will never be a believer in the Romish Church. What she knows of God and His Word will never be forgotten."

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A converted Roman Catholic, in Connecticut, after his baptism was denounced from a Roman Catholic pulpit and his Roman Catholic customers were warned against trading at his store, and were told that clothes purchased

of such a heretic were full of poison and would eat into their very flesh.

The sequel of the foregoing appeared about a year later as thus reported: "The merchant has weathered the storm, thanks to new *Protestant* customers, and is getting back his old *Roman Catholic* customers, now that the denouncing priest, by a stroke of apoplexy, is in his grave."

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"They have come to us from France and Belgium, with the mischievous, infidel and communistic ideas of their countries, and from Canada with the bigotry and unasimilating notions of the medieval Romanism of the Province of Quebec. To these tens of thousands the gospel is not preached at all, except as we see to it that the French-speaking missionary is abroad in the land."

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"If you want to know Roman Catholicism in America, go to Canada or Mexico. In Canada, it was originally transplanted European stock. In Mexico, it was ingrafted. Bitter fruit has it borne in both countries. It has kept the French Canadian down; it has failed to lift the Mexican up. Whether on civilized or uncivilized, its influence has been to repress, suppress and oppress. In the United States Protestantism has compelled it to be on its good behavior."

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The story of the crucified Bibles is of special interest. In Connecticut some Roman Catholics procured copies of the Catholic version of the Scriptures. But the Jesuit priest denounced them as bad books, and some were burned; while one volume, which an artist had in his studio, was closed by six big nails driven through the book. In another instance a missionary left a New Testament with a French Canadian family, who became interested in it. The priest, learning of the fact, said to the woman: "Don't you let one of those miserable venders

of Bibles cross your threshold. Go home and get your husband to nail this book to the door-post; outside, mind you. He can see it and take it back if he wants it." She did as commanded and when the missionary, returning, asked: "Is this the way you treat the Word of God?" she answered, with the French shrug of the shoulders: "Ah, monsieur, *the priest told us to do it.*"

This series of leaflets on the Work of the Society among the Foreign Peoples in America is published by The American Baptist Home Mission Society, 312 Fourth Ave., New York, and can be had from the Society or any District Secretary. Sample copies free; in quantities, 50 cents a hundred.